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SUBJECT: ECONOMIC AGENDA AND ROLE OF WOMEN IN MOROCCO'S  
ISLAMIST JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (C-DI7-01898)

REF: STATE 151319

Classified by Polcouns Craig Karp for reasons 1.4 (b) and  
(d).

11. (C) Summary: Morocco's Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) advocates a market economy and has emphasized its commitment to combat corruption as a key to spurring economic growth and job creation. Like other parties, the PJD has focused more on general economic goals and offered less in terms of how it would achieve them. On fiscal priorities, the party's emphasis has been on enhancing the impact of social expenditures rather than increasing them. The PJD integrates women into the work of the party and imposes internal quotas to ensure that it puts forward adequate numbers of women as candidates and in party leadership positions. That said, the party's public record on advocating women's empowerment and gender equity reflects its conservative orientation. End summary.

12. (SBU) The Justice and Development Party (PJD), Morocco's establishment Islamist party, is the largest single opposition party in the parliament, with 46 out of 325 seats. The PJD won the popular vote (with 503,396 votes - 10.9 percent of the total votes cast) in the September 7 legislative elections. The PJD had also been expected by many to garner the largest number of parliamentary seats, but the reallocation of seats among electoral districts undertaken by the GOM in early 2007 proved even more effective than apparently intended in containing the party's parliamentary presence. In the end, the nationalist Istiqlal Party, which took 496,256 votes - 10.7 percent of the total, ended up with 52 of 325 seats in the Chamber of Deputies as opposed to the PJD's 46.

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The PJD's Economic Program  
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13. (SBU) The PJD advocates a market economy and seeks to promote foreign investment. Countering public corruption and cronyism is the cornerstone of its program to stimulate economic growth. Like other parties, its electoral programs have been short on specifics but long on promising improved economic performance. The party thus campaigned in 2007 on a promise of creating 300,000 new jobs a year and ensuring annual GDP growth of 7 percent.

14. (C) Exactly how a PJD government would achieve these targets remains opaque, particularly regarding fiscal and tax policy, but in general party spokesmen decry what they term the "rentier mentality" that currently exists in Morocco. They promise to reform the system so that it rewards actual work and risk-taking. They also pledge improved governance and administration, more transparent and effective justice, and an education system that matches up more closely with the needs of Morocco's labor market. On fiscal priorities, the party's emphasis has been on enhancing the impact of social expenditures rather than increasing them.

15. (SBU) Other economic proposals are similarly vague. The party praised existing government programs to support small and medium sized enterprises, and argues tax incentives should be directed to them, rather than to banks and other large companies. It has promised new initiatives to support associations that "promote private enterprise." However, the PJD opposed the government's recent tax cut for businesses. It also pledged to work to reduce the size of the informal sector and to provide a training program to help long-time unemployed graduates learn the skills to enable them to secure jobs.

16. (C) Little of this program differs significantly from the party's more traditional rivals, however. Party spokesmen do occasionally raise "Islamic" values by endorsing recent steps to make Islamic banking products more widely available, and by pressing for higher "sin" taxes on alcohol and tobacco. Observers generally credit the party's appeal less to these specific issues than to its emphasis of the need to "moralize public life," and the general image of "rectitude" that it attempts to convey.

17. (C) With widespread public cynicism about Morocco's long-established political parties, and a perception that they seek power either for its own sake or for personal enrichment, the PJD has benefited from this emphasis on public morality. It also draws support from those concerned about societal changes that they believe are separating Morocco from its traditional, conservative, and Islamic traditions.

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Women and the PJD  
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18. (SBU) The PJD fully integrates women into party structures. The party does not have a separate women's organization. Women serve on the party's executive committee. The party maintains a quota system to ensure adequate numbers of women filled a minimum number of leadership and candidate positions. Bassima El-Hakkaoui, a female PJD member of parliament, recently called in a media interview for legislation that would require all parties to meet a minimum threshold for women in leadership and candidate positions. Doing so would be an application of Islamic values, she argued.

19. (C) The PJD put forward more women as candidates in the September elections than any party other than the nationalist Istiqlal. Currently, six of the party's 46 parliamentary deputies are women, a ratio second only to the Istiqlal party. PJD Deputy Secretary-General Lahcen Daoudi recently told us that the party worked hard to identify women to run for parliamentary seats but allowed that they were more difficult to recruit than men. Not only did many PJD women have family commitments that precluded running for office, many were "particularly repelled" by corruption and malfeasance in the electoral system, he asserted.

110. (SBU) Nevertheless, the prominence of women in the PJD has been increasing steadily since the late 1980s. The PJD's overall orientation is Islamic-modernist. PJD women in party leadership positions come from varied backgrounds but typically include doctors, pharmacists, and engineers. We do not see evidence that women in the party represent a liberalizing element per se. One of the PJD's six female

members of parliament does not wear the hijab, but almost without exception, all PJD female party activists are muhajibat. The degree of social conservatism of PJD women leaders varies according to the individual.

¶11. (SBU) The PJD initially opposed reforms to the family law code aimed at expanding legal protections for women in civil status issues. When first proposed by the leftist Popular Socialist Party (PPS) in 2000, the PJD organized demonstrations opposing the "imposition of western values" on Moroccan society. The PJD subsequently dropped its opposition after the GOM appointed a blue ribbon commission, including credible Islamic scholars, to oversee the revision process. Morocco's reforms to the "mudawana" (family law code) were eventually codified in 2004 and are widely seen as a model for expanding women's legal protections in Islamic countries, although the actual application of the reforms continues to challenge the Moroccan judicial establishment.

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